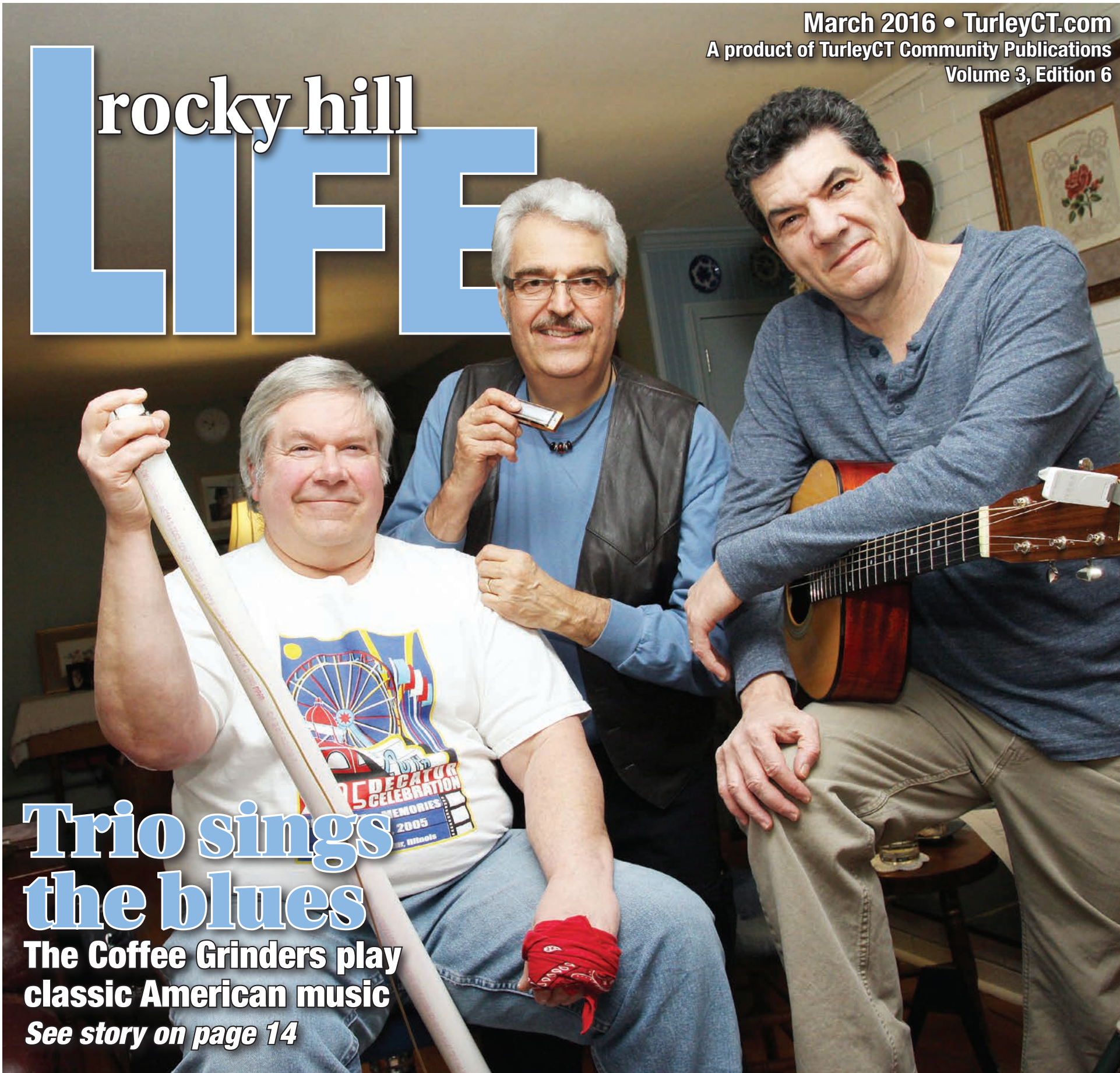


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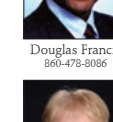
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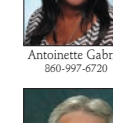
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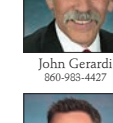
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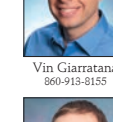
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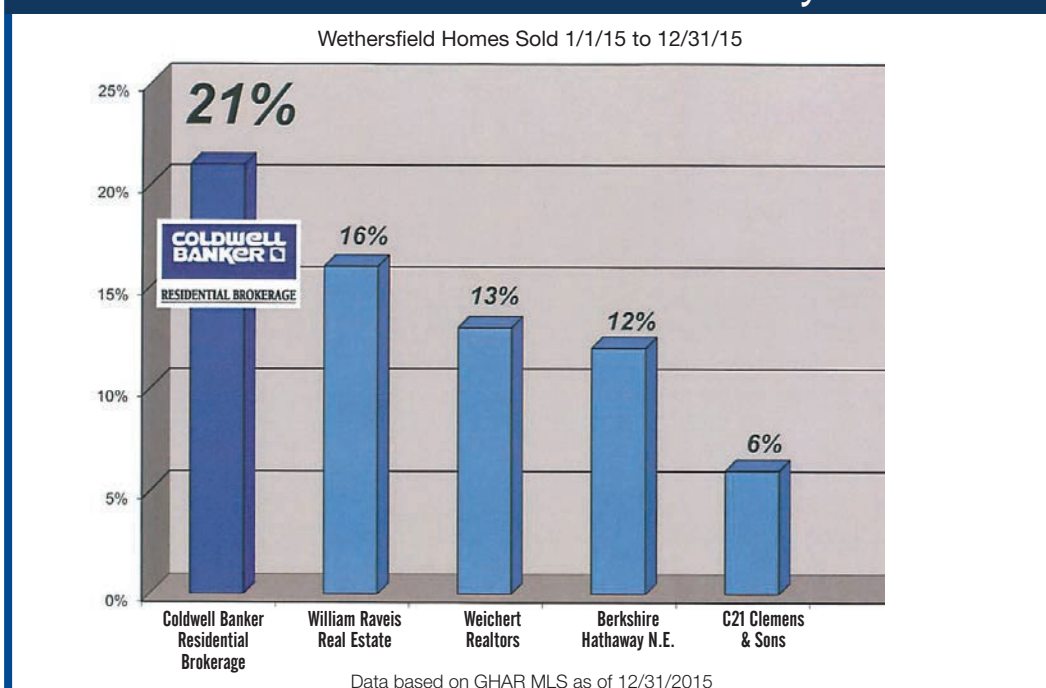


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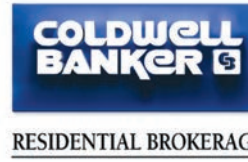
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rocky hill LIFE

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"We're still trying to explore different options to see what makes sense. The seniors need a space to call their own."

—Mayor Claudia Baio

See story page 6

ON THE COVER

The local acoustic blues trio called The Coffee Grinders is made up of Howard Horn (wash tub bass), Jim Choquette (harmonica) and Frank Breen (guitar).

Photo by Lisa Brisson
See story page 14

- 4 Blazing a Trail
- 10 LIFE in the classroom
- 16 Student of the month
- 18 A starting point
- 22 Your Money, Your LIFE
- 27 Living Your Best LIFE
- 30 From the mayor's desk
- 32 Still Hill Brewery
- 34 Slice of LIFE
- 36 News roundup
- 37 Calendar
- 38 People notes
- 40 A new leash on LIFE

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Blazing a trail

Boy Scout completes service project while benefiting park

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Visitors to the Dividend Pond Park and Archaeological District will find a freshly cleared trail to explore after the recent completion of Joseph Goodrich's Eagle Scout project.

The area, known as June's Trail, is named after the late June Cooke, an active resident who played a large part in making Dividend Park what it is today.

"She blazed it originally, but it was never truly a trail you could walk down," 16-year-old Joseph explained. "That was the last area of the park that wasn't finished."

"He thought it was a good tribute to finish up her trail," Brian Goodrich said.

He is Joseph's father and scout master.

The endeavor began this past April when Joseph started searching for a project to earn the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouts. These projects have specific guidelines that scouts must follow.

"The project can't be fund raising, it can't be routine maintenance like mowing someone's lawn or something, it can't help the Boy Scouts or any commercial organization," Joseph said. "You really have to give back to the community and demonstrate leadership."

Joseph reached out to Ed Chiucarello, founder of the Riverfront Preservation Society, as well as Lisa Zerio, director of the Rocky Hill Parks and Recreation Department. He also contacted members of the Rocky Hill Hiking Association who not only informed him of the area, but also volunteered to help with the cleanup.

"No one had really used the trail because there wasn't much there," Joseph said.

A junior at Rocky Hill High School, Joseph said Dividend Park was especially important to him because he remembers his days camping near that spot when he was

a younger scout.

Before beginning the project to overhaul the trail Joseph, his father and several other volunteers from both the scouts and the hiking association went to the area to inspect it and devise a plan. They realized part of the cleanup process would include removing a few tires that had been dumped there.

Joseph's project was approved by the scouts in early September and he and his band of volunteers immediately got to work.

They quickly realized that there were more than a couple of tires hidden along the trail. They uncovered a total of 19 tires in the area that stretches three quarters of a mile.

Also discovered along the trail were three small streams that Joseph wanted to address. For these smaller streams Joseph, with the help of his father, installed concrete stepping stones.

"It's just enough of a step that you don't get wet," he said.

For the larger stream, he received approval to install a small bridge.

"One of the reasons I put a bridge in is that my father knows how to do it," he said. "We got the inspiration from some of the state parks where they do just a straightforward, not complicated piece."

The bridge, which was built in the Goodrich's driveway and driven to the site, sits atop six-by-six beams. It was created with knowledge from their past experiences on camping and hiking trips throughout the northeast.

"We put chicken wire on top because we found that if you don't put something there, it can get slip-

pery," Joseph said. "We really learned a lot from prior experience."

Once the trail was cleared and the bridges were installed, he placed green trail markers throughout the area in remembrance of Cooke.

"All of these blazes are green. That was her original color for this trail on the map," he said. "It was her trail and it will remain her trail."

"She didn't want to be in the

limelight, but they did this as a tribute to her," his father added.

With the completion of the project in December, Joseph said he and his 26 volunteers spent a total of 68.7 hours working on the trail. He still has some smaller requirements to fulfill to earn his Eagle rank, but he remains hopeful to have it all completed by his birthday on March 19.

After becoming an Eagle Scout, Joseph plans to stay active in the organization he has been a part of since childhood.

"I joined the Cub Scouts as soon as possible," he said.

"I like all the opportunities

Sixteen-year-old Joseph Goodrich, a junior at Rocky Hill High School, recently completed his Eagle Scout project by clearing an unused trail at the Dividend Pond Park and Archaeological District.



Photo by Allie Rivera

that scouting brings.”

His involvement with the scouts has helped to shape him into a leader in ways that he is confident will prepare him for the future.

“It’s a great place to learn how to be a leader, but also have fun. It’s a great balance of both,” he said. “If you fail in a job, you get fired, but if you fail in the scouts, you say, ‘Oops,’ and you learn not to do it again.”

His leadership abilities also qualified him to join the Order of

“It’s a whole organization based on outdoor leadership. I like all the opportunities that scouting brings.”

—Joseph Goodrich

the Arrow, which is more commonly known as the National Honor Society of the Boy Scouts of America. This group recognizes scouts for their brotherhood, cheerfulness and service.

In addition to his time spent in the scouts, Joseph is also active at the First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, serving on the Student Leadership Committee as well as being the junior member at large on

the Church Board. In his spare time, he and his father enjoy building model rockets.

He is looking for new ways to give back to the community. Father and son are pleased to see people are already making use of their hard work.

“Other people have commented that they didn’t know there was a trail there, and now they use it,” Brian Goodrich said.

“I like being able to see that other people are using it,” Joseph added. “Seeing the end result is great.” **RHL**



When clearing out the area for June's Trail, Boy Scout Joseph Goodrich and his volunteer friends discovered 19 abandoned tires.



The new, green trail markers that Joseph Goodrich installed show June's Trail, named in honor of the late June Cooke.

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Searching for solutions

Additional space is being sought for senior citizen programming

by Mark Jahne
Editor

There is a general consensus that more space is needed for the activities and programs designed for the town's senior citizens. The challenge is determining how much space and where to find it.

New Mayor Claudia Baio made a campaign promise to solve this problem. Town staff were already looking for solutions and made some basic changes to free up small amounts of space in town hall for senior use.

That's better than nothing, but

the senior population will only grow as the baby boomers enter their golden years, so the goal is to do more than stop-gap solutions.

"We're still trying to explore different options to see what makes sense. The seniors need a space to call their own," Baio said.

She added that this does not necessarily mean a stand-alone building. The mayor noted that the seniors like the intergenerational activities that are available to them in a community center that also houses a preschool program.



Photos by Mark Jahne

Marlene O'Leary, program coordinator of the Friday Group that meets at the Rocky Hill Senior Center, stands between fellow members Mary Jane Owen, left, and Muffie Fanelli.

"Our staff is doing a fabulous job with what they have. We need to do something better," Baio said.

Marlene O'Leary is program coordinator of what is informally called the Friday Group, a collection of older residents who faithfully visit

the senior center ever Friday. Many also attend on other days of the week.

"The Friday Group is basically a social group," she said. "We do Wii bowling on Wednesdays and Fridays."

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They enjoy lunch, hold meetings and sometimes bring in guest speakers. They also enjoy afternoon bingo. Members like to play cards and take bus trips to the casinos. They enjoy the newly installed bocce and shuffleboard courts outside their center as well.

"We desperately need a bigger bus so we can do long-distance trips. We would like to have an exercise room with all the equipment. We would like to have more activities for the men," O'Leary said.

"We would like to have our own center, wherever it is. We'd like to do more things, but we don't have the room," she added.

She said the seniors enjoy the intergenerational programs held with the town-run preschool program located elsewhere in the building. O'Leary said their preference is that, if the senior center were to be relocated to another facility, the preschool comes with them.

Those who like to dance have to go to the Elmwood Senior Center in West Hartford to do so, O'Leary said. In addition, Rocky Hill residents

"We're still trying to explore different options to see what makes sense. The seniors need a space to call their own."

—Mayor Claudia Baio

notice that other senior centers they visit are larger and have more to offer.

She blamed at least part of that on the municipal budget.

"It appears that they're always cutting back in the budget on us," she said.

O'Leary said seniors are pleased with the food offered for lunch each day. It's both tasty and inexpensive.

The Stepney Seniors is an organized group that meets at the senior center every Thursday. It is led by President Rita Thibodeau and Vice President Barbara Ortner. They spoke about the need for additional space.

"This room we're in, we use that room for lunch, for bingo, for cards," Thibodeau said.

They would like to have a sepa-

rate dining area as well as a room dedicated to art lessons. Plus the tables are banged up. She also wishes that the computer lab had not been relocated to the library.

"We're very limited for space. We've been talking about this for a long time now," she said.

"Rocky Hill seems to concentrate on schools, and I know that's important," she added.

"The senior population is increasing. We don't have exercise rooms available to accommodate the younger seniors who are coming in," Ortner said. "All these other towns are really concentrating on it."

She defined younger seniors as people in their 60s. Ortner is also a member of the town's senior task force. She said the older folks are willing to share whatever additional

space they get with others.

"It does not necessarily have to be a senior center, period. We don't feel as though we're asking too much. I know the mayor is interested in the seniors," she said.

Another need is space for activities that would attract more men. Someone donated a pool table, but there is nowhere to put it.

Ortner praised Baio for creating a senior liaison committee that consists of three Town Council members and two representatives from the senior task force.

The January "Pivotal Press" senior newsletter offers insight into the level of activity at the senior center, membership in which is free to Rocky Hill residents. Non-residents may join for a \$10 annual fee.

Lunch is served five days a week at a cost of \$3.50 for members. A nurse, hearing consultant and foot care program are available on various dates.

A Setback Club plays every Tuesday and Thursday is Mah Jongg day. Wii bowling is offered on Wednesdays and Fridays. There is



Barbara and Oliver are happy in their new home.

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a craft group every Tuesday and a wood carving class every Wednesday. A poker group is in formation.

The Senior Serenaders sing on Tuesdays and bingo is offered four days a week after lunch. Exercise and walking programs are also on the agenda, as well as day trips.

"We have been exploring options this past year," Lisa Zerio, director of parks and recreation, said. "We made some quite simple fixes."

That includes compiling statistics to determine which programs are most and least popular.

The Wii bowling program was given a second television so that more people can play. The wood carving program was moved to another room to free up space for additional programming.

More space was also freed up for the nurse.

"The latest thing we just did, in watching the numbers for the computer classes, we moved the computer lab over to the library," Zerio said.

There were rarely more than two or three seniors in the lab at any one time. That freed up space for the seniors to use during the day and teenagers to use at night.

Zerio said the town may raze the nearby town-owned Kennedy House next to the police station and replace it with a new structure that would house the senior center, preschool program, food pantry and evening youth programs.

The town is also in discussions with the Tennis & Fitness Center of Rocky Hill about offering senior fitness programs at that facility.

"We are stewards of the taxpayers' funds so we are trying to do what is best for the community. We are trying to follow the

demographics," Zerio said.

She added that the number of senior citizens is growing, both in Rocky Hill and across the nation.

"Obviously, we need more space," Mayor Baio said as she led a delegation that welcomed U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy on a Jan. 6 tour of the senior center, located in a wing of the town hall/community center building.

"I want to make sure that my work is matching up with Claudia's priorities," Murphy told the older residents in attendance.

He said money for senior activities is already available to communities such as Rocky Hill through the Older Americans Act. He is not sure if it can be applied to space issues, but pledged to find out.

The senator was shown the scattered rooms where senior activities take place.

The Connecticut Democrat serves on the powerful Appropriations Committee. He was also here at the mayor's invitation to visit the Rocky Hill Volunteer Fire Department and see what could be done to provide more funding for public safety.

The entourage went to fire headquarters at Main Street and Old Forge Road after the senior center tour, where they were welcomed by Fire Chief Michael Garrahy and Fire Marshal Rich Renstrom. Garrahy told him the department responds to an average of 700 calls annually.

Murphy said there are two federal grants available to fire departments that can assist with capital purchases. It is possible this money could be acquired by the town to pay for updated breathing apparatus for firefighters. **RHL**



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LIFE

in the classroom

Curtains up on an inclusive theater program

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

More than 50 elementary school students made their way into the all-purpose room at Stevens School. The room was abuzz with excitement as they piled their coats and backpacks along the wall, some taking a seat on the floor, others bouncing from group to group talking and laughing.

About half of them had just trav-

eled across town from West Hill School and were exploring the new space where they would be spending the afternoon. The crowd represented a diverse population, but their reason for coming together that day was singular – to put on a show.

Jen Nagel and Amber Saporoso, special education teachers at Stevens and West Hill, respectively, believe that live theater has the power to bring people together. They have



Stevens School special education teacher Jen Nagel, pictured, along with West Hill School special education teacher Amber Saporoso, are bringing their schools together to put on an inclusive production of Maurice Sendak's "Chicken Soup with Rice." Nagel read it to the more than 50 participating students on their first day of rehearsals.

Photo by Allie Rivera

teamed up to create the Curtain Call Collaborators.

"We're piloting this program," Saporoso said. "It's an inclusion program of students with special needs working with their peers."

Although this is the first time that this type of program will be held in town, the concept is not new to the teachers, who have known

each other for years.

"Jen and I worked in a previous district together and she did this," Saporoso said. "Now that we're in the same district again, we wanted to bring the schools together."

The process began back in November when Nagel and Saporoso held a meeting to see if there was any interest among the fourth and

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fifth grade students at each school to put on a show.

"We had a pretty good turnout to that," the latter said.

After seeing the level of interest, the two teachers decided to go forward with their idea and opened the play up to any interested fourth or

fifth grade students. Between 50 and 55 students chose to participate.

Knowing that not all students may crave the spotlight, the teachers created multiple necessary onstage and offstage roles from which students could choose, including acting, stage crew and prop creator, among others.

"I was really excited when I heard that we could help design costumes," West Hill fifth-grader Gabby LaFave, 10, said. "I love to design clothes in my sketchbook at home and I love to paint, so I thought I could be creative here."

Other students, such as 11-year-old Becca Markowitz, are excited to be able to act on stage.

"My mom's a stage manager at the Hartt School so I've grown up around acting my entire life," the Stevens fifth-grader said. "I'm looking forward to being with my friends

and having fun."

When the students came together that chilly January afternoon for their first rehearsal, they had no idea what show they would be doing. They soon learned that they would be helping to create the show's script, basing it off of the Maurice Sendak book "Chicken Soup with Rice."

"This book is broken up into very specific little themes," Nagel said to the crowd of students. "This is the book we're going to base our show off of, but you get to make it as you want to."

The book is a short, rhyming children's story that describes different ways to eat chicken soup with rice during each month of the year. At their first rehearsal, students were divided into small groups and assigned a different month from which to draw the inspiration for

Photo by Allie Rivera



Students from Stevens School participating in the new Curtain Call Collaborators program struck their best superstar pose at their first rehearsal. The program looks to include students with special needs in theater programming with their typical peers. They are Grace Donahue, Nick Jokl, Kylie Ballard, Emily Massicotte, Kevin Destefano, Fides Wong and Rachel Murdock.

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their scene.

"It's an interesting book, so we really can do a lot with it," Gabby said.

Getting students from both schools together frequently to rehearse could be difficult to coordinate, so Nagel and Saporoso had them join writing groups with others from their same school so that they would be able to rehearse more easily.

Putting on a well-produced play is their goal, but it is not the primary component of the Curtain Call Collaborators. Nagel and Saporoso said they are excited to be able to bring students of different needs together in a creative and supportive environment.

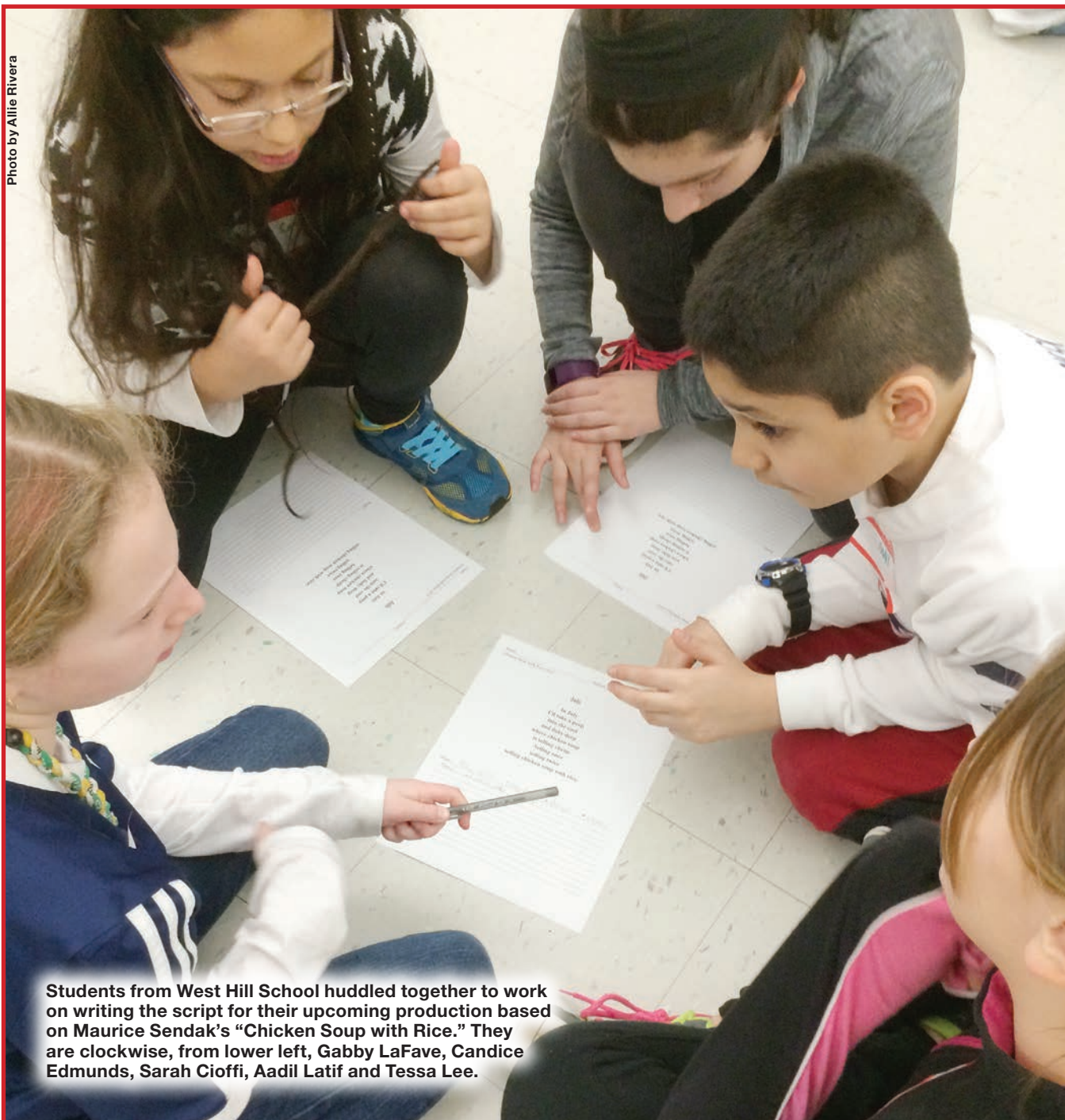
This will benefit those with special needs by giving them an outlet they may not otherwise have and benefit their peers who may not be used to working with those with special needs.

By the first day of rehearsals, those collaborations were already beginning to form. The teachers' lesson that theater is open to anyone was already beginning to stick.

"Just because you have a disability doesn't mean you can't do it," Becca said. "Anyone can do it, even if you've never done it before or you're afraid to do it." **RHL**

The Curtain Call Collaborators' production of "Chicken Soup with Rice" will be held April 6-7, with a production for the public the evening of April 7.

Photo by Allie Rivera



Students from West Hill School huddled together to work on writing the script for their upcoming production based on Maurice Sendak's "Chicken Soup with Rice." They are clockwise, from lower left, Gabby LaFave, Candice Edmunds, Sarah Cioffi, Aadil Latif and Tessa Lee.

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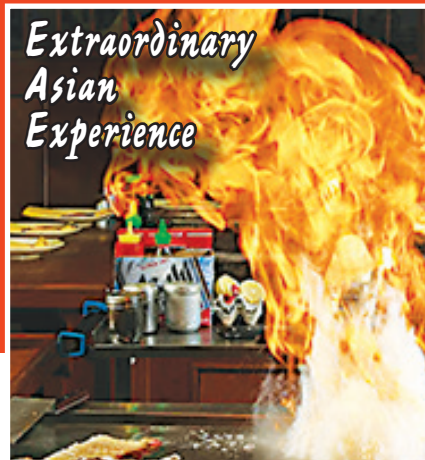
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Belting out the blues

The Coffee Grinders pay homage to classic Americana

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Fans of traditional Delta blues don't have to venture all the way to Mississippi to hear that classic style of American music. It's being performed right here in Rocky Hill by a trio that definitely considers itself old school.

Frank Breen, Jim Choquette and Howie Horn make up the Coffee Grinders, loosely based out of Choquette's house. Their music is all acoustic and they perform throughout Connecticut and Western Massachusetts.

Horn and Choquette reside in Rocky Hill while Breen lives in East Hartford. His band mates consider Breen a human encyclopedia of Delta blues history and this knowl-

edge is incorporated into their performance.

He plays acoustic guitar, Choquette plays acoustic guitar and harmonica, and Horn handles such unusual instruments as the jug and wash tub bass. All three sing. The trio has been together for two years.

Their influences include such legendary blues men as Robert Johnson, Charley Patton and Muddy Waters. They also do acoustic blues covers of songs by the Beatles, Rolling Stones and others.

The Coffee Grinders are members of the Connecticut Blues Society. They were finalists in its 2014 solo/duo challenge and 2015 band challenge.

"Frank and I met at an open

mic in Newington. I heard him playing," Choquette said. "Howie and I have known each other for a while."

Choquette and Horn first met when their sons played together in the Rocky Hill High School Royal Blues Marching Band several years ago.

"I've been playing jug band music, working out of New Haven almost right through since 1975. A good part of that repertoire is blues," Horn said.

Breen first picked up a guitar in

1969.

He gave up the instrument for 12 years before deciding to give it another try and the other two men said he has become a master player. At first, he was a solo act. Then he met Choquette and Horn and discovered their passion for Delta blues.

"I learned this, started practicing and loved it. Young people really got into it. All generations like what we do," Breen said.

They used to play together locally at The Music Score on the

Silas Deane Highway. Their reach has grown since then.

"We've got a pretty good following up in Stafford," Choquette said.

Breen said musicians who prefer to play electric guitar blues are now picking up acoustic instruments to better present the original sound.

"I always loved blues music and wanted to play blues music," Choquette said.

He is thrilled when members of the audience get up and dance.

"The old Delta blues stuff is the basis for so much other stuff that has been popular over the past 50 years or so," Horn said. "We play a lot of Robert Johnson, Bo Carter."

American blues is the root of rock 'n' roll, country and folk music, he added. Many of the old-timers stole guitar riffs from one another and students of the genre can pick these out.

Led Zeppelin fans may be familiar with a song the band released in 1971 named "When the Levy Breaks." Breen and Horn said it is a remake of a blues tune first written and recorded by the husband-wife duo of

"We'd be sitting there playing acoustic and the next thing you knew the grinder would go off."

—Frank Breen

Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie in 1929. The song relates to the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927.

"We try to do it in our own flavor, throw our own flair on it," Breen said in describing the trio's sound.

"We like other music besides the blues," Horn added.

Recorded music only dates back to around 1900 but the blues goes back farther than that. Breen enjoys educating their audiences about the history of the music.

"A lot of the old stuff is new to me," Choquette said.

"What we do is so much fun. When we play, it's like total freedom. We've got a pretty good thing going," he added.

"It's not an ego thing for us, it's a music thing," Horn said.

Breen said being a small and local blues trio can be challenging because it involves much more than mastering the music.

They have to be their own public relations and marketing people, recruit their own shows, and more. They are always on the lookout for new performance spaces.

All three men have full-time jobs: Breen works in information technology at IBM, Choquette sells building materials and Horn is an information technology professional for a financial services company.

Breen said the joy he feels from playing his guitar allows him to leave work behind when he gets home.

"Playing music on the side helps you get through a corporate day job,"

Horn added.

Over the years, he has played clarinet, tuba, saxophone and banjo in addition to the current jug and wash tub bass. One hand wrapped in a red handkerchief to protect it from injury slides up and down the lone string to produce different sounds as the other hand plucks the string.

He admits that the use of this unusual instrument draws attention to the trio. The men said they believe they are the only band playing live Delta blues anywhere in Connecticut.

Breen said the trio got its name, at least in part, from an experience they had while playing across the river at a coffee house in Glastonbury.

"We'd be sitting there playing acoustic and the next thing you knew, the grinder would go off," he said with a smile.

Another connection to their name is an old song named "Coffee Grindin' Blues." **RHL**

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Caitlin Conneely, a fourth-grader at Stevens School, was recognized with a Husky Hero Spotlight Award for her kindness toward others and hard-working determination. The 10-year-old is active both in and out of school and was described by her teacher as truly exceptional.

Photos by Allie Rivera

Student of the month

Caitlin Conneely is called kind, caring and conscientious

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Ten-year-old Caitlin Conneely may have a quiet voice, but her actions have made a loud impact.

"I've been blessed throughout my career to have so many wonderful students, but Caitlin stood out," her teacher Lee-Ann Flynn said.

The fourth grade student at Stevens School received a Husky Hero Spotlight Award, the school's recognition for those who go above and beyond to be kind, respectful and hard working throughout

the building.

According to Flynn, Caitlin lives those values every day.

"She's the most conscientious student you'll ever meet," she said. "She's truly exceptional."

For Caitlin, being kind and hard working is a part of life and not a means to recognition. She is involved in activities both in school and out simply because they are fun.

She is an active member of the Student Council for the second year in a row.

"We make all the activities here,

Our next one is Crazy Hair Day," Caitlin said. "We're earning money for a new swing set."

To participate in Crazy Hair Day, she and the other members of the Student Council asked their classmates to bring in \$1 to go toward the swing set fund. Previous fund-raising days included Sports Day and Pajama Day.

Caitlin said more days are in the planning stages and the Student Council hopes to keep the themes a surprise.

"I think we do about one a

month," she said.

In addition to their work increasing school spirit, Caitlin and the other members of the Student Council also complete charitable work, in which she is always sure to participate. Since she began as a council member, Caitlin has helped to run a cake drive, collecting cake mixes and frosting for children at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, as well as a clothing and food drive for the town's food pantry.

Caitlin said that the teamwork and friendship she shared with her

fellow council members during these events was the best part and she is glad that she chose to join group this past year.

"I had never heard of it before, so I wanted to see what it was all about," she said. "I got to meet new people and we came up with all these ideas together."

Caitlin is also active with the school's Book Buddies and Study Buddies programs that pair older students with children in kindergarten and first grade.

"We do math pages together or we read a book to them," she said.

"It's a great peer mentoring program for them," Flynn added. "They all get a lot out of the experience."

Outside of school, Caitlin stays physically active. She has been playing soccer since the age of 4 and has played for the Rocky Hill

"I cried," Caitlin said.

"We both cried," her mother added with a laugh.

For the Conneely family, which also includes 12-year-old Hannah and 7-year-old Connor, Irish step dancing is a family affair. Caitlin began seven years ago at age 3.

"My sister did it for five years and my cousin and other cousin did it," she said. "We're Irish. My grandma and grandpa are from Ireland."

She brought that knowledge of her family's past into a recent school assignment about immigration.

"Even with all that she does, she is still committed to being an outstanding student," Flynn said. "She's a role model to her peers."

Although her mother and teacher said they are proud of Caitlin for all of her accomplishments, both academically and

"She's just genuinely kind and has the ability to look at any situation from another person's perspective. That's rare at this age."

– Teacher Lee-Ann Flynn

travel team for the past two years.

"I've met new friends and it's a really fun game," she said.

She also has been playing basketball for the past four years through the town Parks and Recreation Department, where her father serves as her coach.

"I like everything about basketball," she said.

When not on the field or court, Caitlin can be found in the dance studio. She takes seven classes per week at the Griffith Academy in Wethersfield in jazz, tap, ballet, figures and her favorite, Irish step dancing.

"That one is competitive," she said. "I have competitions almost every Sunday."

At one such step dancing competition in early March, she placed first among roughly 25 other dancers.

"That was a huge thing," Caitlin's mother, Tara Conneely, said. "It's an individual's competition, so she's not competing as a team. It was just her."

personally, they agreed that her kindness, maturity and determination are what continue to set her apart from her peers.

"Not only is she a good student, but she's a friend to everyone and she's so kind," Flynn said. "She's a serious student, but she also has that silly side, and it's nice to watch her progress and be so mature, but still be a kid at the same time."

According to her mother, Caitlin has grown as a person.

"She has come so far. She was an anxious child and she's really come a long way," Conneely said. "She's so strong and she shows her independence. She wants to do well in anything that she does."

Flynn said that determination and strong sense of self have helped to shape Caitlin into a caring and well-rounded student with an unparalleled maturity.

"She's just genuinely kind and has the ability to look at any situation from another person's perspective," Flynn said. "That's rare at this age." **RHL**



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Photo by Mark Jahne



Superintendent of Schools Mark Zito

A starting point

Superintendent requests nearly 8 percent more school spending

by Mark Jahne
Editor

It's budget season for the Rocky Hill Public Schools and the Board of Education is busy perusing a proposed 2016-2017 education budget that calls for a 7.83 percent increase in spending.

The board's job is to review all line items, make those changes it deems appropriate, and then vote on a budget that will be forwarded to the Town Council for inclusion in the overall municipal budget. The council can alter the board's bottom line, but it cannot make any other specific changes.

Superintendent of Schools Mark Zito made his \$40,098,681 budget presentation the evening of Jan. 21. It represents a \$2.9 million increase over the current operating budget.

Senior administrators joined him to explain the document's priorities and answer questions. Among

those quietly watching the proceedings was Town Manager Guy Scaife.

"This year you're going to see a fairly significant increase in the budget," Zito said. "We are proposing additional staff members to deal with increased enrollment. The people costs are the most significant drivers."

He is projecting an 8.79 percent increase in the cost of health insurance for school district employees. That is in spite of increased cost sharing in terms of co-pays and such.

Salaries and benefits alone make up 83 percent of the overall budget proposal and represent a \$1.2 million increase from the current document. These are considered fixed costs because of contract obligations and the need to offer employees health insurance as part of a negotiated benefit package.

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Zito told the board his budget is designed to preserve essential programs. Most of the increase is because enrollment is increasing and that creates the need for additional space and staff, particularly at West Hill School.

He wants to hire an additional six teachers for West Hill, plus two technology people, one English as a second language teacher and a half-time special education teacher. Two of the six teachers are already in the system, hired this past summer to deal with West Hill's growth. The same is true of one of the technology positions.

In addition to salaries and health insurance, major cost drivers are tuition, textbooks and technology. Teachers, by contract, will receive a 1.82 percent general wage increase, as well as a negotiated step increase of 1.18 percent for those who advance to the next salary level.

Zito was pleased to present the board with educational data indicating that Rocky Hill students perform above statewide and DRG averages on standard tests. DRGs are state-created groupings of towns of similar population and wealth, among other factors, used for comparison purposes.

This is true at multiple grade levels in such areas as English language and mathematics. In DRG D, which includes Rocky Hill and 23

other towns, the district posted above-average scores on the Smarter Balanced math test while ranking 16th in per pupil spending.

Only seven of the towns that spend more per pupil than Rocky Hill showed higher test scores. This town currently ranks 123rd out of 166 school districts statewide in per-pupil spending.

This town also has the second-lowest per-pupil spending in the DRG for special education. The superintendent said this all adds up to high quality at below-average cost.

"The data are very clear. Rocky

alone has seen a rise in enrollment of 122 children in just two years.

As a result, class sizes now exceed Board of Education guidelines in kindergarten and grades one, two and four. Twenty of the 32 overall classes are considered overcrowded by district standards.

Projections compiled by the New England School Development Council predict an additional 190 students will enroll in the Rocky Hill Public Schools over the next two years, all but 15 of them at the elementary level.

There are only two elementary schools in town, West Hill and

new contract. The current five-year deal expires in June. He is projecting an increase of more than 11 percent.

The projected cost of technology is up for the third year in a row as the administration looks to improve various aspects of security, including phone upgrades and school access control.

It would also like to expand the Chromebook program that exists in the lower grades to the high school. Chairman Frank Morse summed up the challenges faced by the board this budget year.

"We all realize we are in dire need of space and teachers.

Otherwise, we will need to have 30 children per classroom and we don't want to go down that road," he said.

"Rocky Hill taxpayers are getting a good value for their dollars," he added.

He said Zito is not the kind of superintendent who puts fat in the budget so that the board can then trim it and look good to taxpayers and voters. What's requested is what is needed and he predicted that the proposed budget would not be dramatically reduced.

"It's a high number. I think it's going to cause some shock when it gets out into the community. But I think it's a responsible budget," Morse said.

The board was scheduled to adopt a final budget as this issue of Rocky Hill LIFE went to press. **RHL**

"We are proposing additional staff members to deal with increased enrollment."

—Superintendent of Schools Mark Zito

Hill taxpayers are getting good value for their education dollar," Zito said.

Unlike many other area towns, Rocky Hill is experiencing enrollment growth. Overall enrollment in grades pre-K through 12 has risen from 2,421 in October 2013 to 2,608, an increase of 187 children.

Adding to the challenge is that most of these students are of elementary school age and most of them live within the part of town served by West Hill. That school

Stevens. The space crunch already has required the board to place seven temporary portable classrooms at Stevens and three at West Hill. If it decides to expend the funds to resolve the West Hill space crunch, that would mean another four portables at West Hill, for a grand total of 14.

Still to be determined is the cost of bus transportation. Charles Zettergren, assistant superintendent of finance and operations, said the district has gone out to bid on a



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Welcome sign

This handcrafted stone welcome sign is painted with a decorative pineapple and was made in Vermont. It can be found at Consignment Originals, located at 2139 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill. They can be reached at 860-257-3224 or online at www.consignit.com



Crescent sofa

This crescent sofa is aluminum framed and perfect for hosting an outdoor gathering around a fire pit. The sofa comes from a variety of brands and can be customized for material and color. It can be found at New England Patio and Hearth, located at 974 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield. They can be reached at 860-563-1000 or online at www.newenglandpatioandhearth.com **RHL**

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A scouting celebration

Courtesy photos

Members of Girl Scout Troops 10205 and 10230 gathered to celebrate the achievements of their members. Mayor Claudia Baio attended the ceremony and presented each of the honored scouts with a personal proclamation.



Mary Manwaring lights the candles to prepare for the service. She is the leader of both troops.



Baio stands with Troop 10230 Bronze Award winners Bria Alexander, Melanie Ballard, Bethany Manwaring, Alissa Rambharose and Katie Shattuck.



Silver Award recipients Sarah Mitchell and Julia Mayor Manwaring, both of Troop 10205, flank Mayor Claudia Baio.

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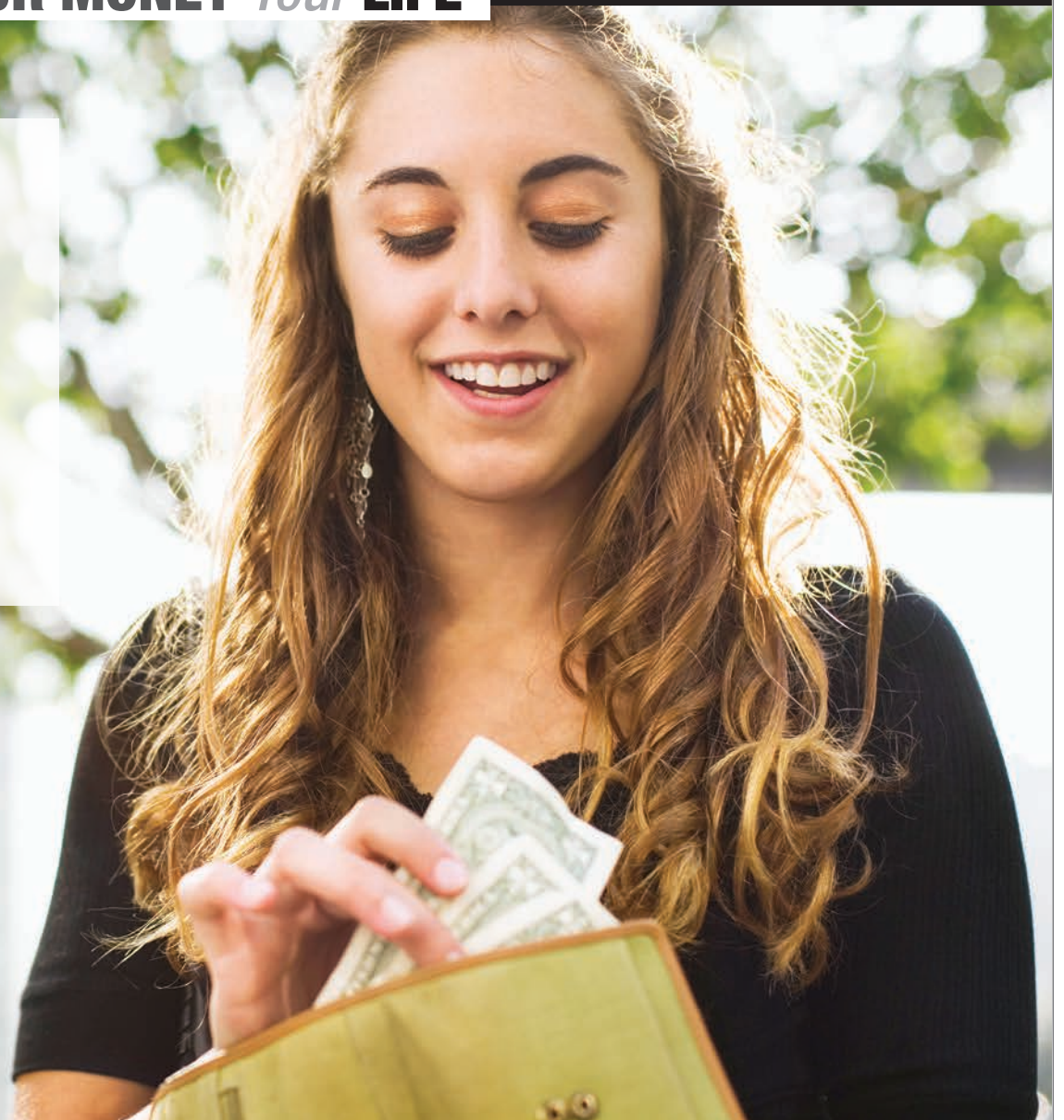
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YOUR MONEY *Your* LIFE

Planning to spend

How to manage disposable income

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor



Whether people are 28 or 68, they want to go to concerts, enjoy a meal at a restaurant with friends or take a trip. With the high cost of living and the importance of saving money, having funds for these “inessential” purchases may seem impossible.

Local experts say it is a possibility, as long as careful planning and

budgeting is done.

Diane Fisher, senior vice president of investments with the FDW Group of Raymond James in West Hartford, said ‘budget’ is a word people of all ages balk at, but it’s an important concept to grasp and execute. Certified Financial Planner Nancy Fellingner of planningWise Wealth in Simsbury agreed.

“For absolutely anyone at any

stage in life, it’s essential to have a spending plan,” she said. “I call it a spending plan as opposed to a budget because most people, I think, kind of bristle at the thought of a budget. They think, ‘Oh, it’s deprivation, the things I can’t do because I’m on a budget.’”

The basic concept is to make sure all expenses are tracked, and identifying what is essential,

Fellinger said. Putting that plan into practice is the challenge.

For the Millennial generation, those born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s, Fisher said setting up a good budget after graduating high school or college is “the most important thing.” It can be easy to do; going online, there are many budget forms available, or, many financial advisors offer their



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services to young people for free.

"They can find a financial advisor who can help them set up a budget – there are a lot of goodhearted people out there who will spend the time," she said. "It's all overwhelming unless you have some certain knowledge of it."

Fisher acknowledged that saving money, especially for inessential spending, is difficult.

"The game changer is student loans," she said. "The money they used to put towards discretionary stuff [goes to loans] – they almost have another mortgage or rent."

Fellinger said the challenge many people have is not just distinguishing what qualifies as discretionary, but making choices between those items. If a person wants to watch a movie, do they go to the movies, or get a monthly Netflix account? If they want to go to the museum, do they wait and go on a free or reduced admission day or pay full price? If they want a cup of coffee in the morning, do they make it at home or stop at a coffee shop?

"It's about being conscious of not only what's being bought, but what other alternatives there are," she said. "Sometimes it comes down to, 'Yeah, I've thought about this, but this experience of having this cup of coffee means something to me and I'm going to make a choice to do that ... I may need to make some changes in other areas of my life so I can do that and not be stretching myself.'"

People need to realize that if they handle their finances properly, they can still get concert tickets or go out to dinner, Fisher said, but it's most important to save first. At any age, people should save 10 percent of their income, a practice she said is harder now than it was in the past, and avoid impulse purchases.

When it comes to determining how much to set aside for discretionary spending, Fisher said it can be hard to calculate it, percentage-wise, but she recommends including everything someone wants to spend outside of the essentials. It's necessary to go through all expenses – Netflix may seem like only \$9 a

month and Hulu only \$11 – to determine what truly is necessary.

Fellinger quoted baseball great Yogi Berra, who said, "Ninety percent of the game is half mental." Much of what drives the success of a spend-

"It's about being conscious of not only what's being bought, but what alternatives there are."

–Nancy Fellinger

ing plan is a person's outlook and how they approach it mentally.

"If we're doing it in a positive kind of way – this is something I can do, this is positive for myself, I feel really good about this – it's going to take [you] in one direction," she said. "If it's perceived as a drag or punishment, it's not going to be good."

Regardless of how limited a bud-

get is, Fellinger said including disposable income as part of a budget is important, because the things it's spent on are what makes life enjoyable. She said people need to look at the entirety of their finances and other resources, including the time spent, energy invested and the return they get on an experience.

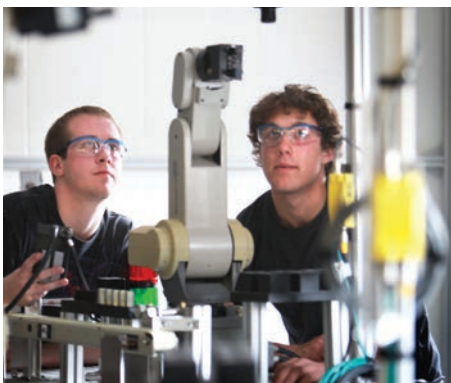
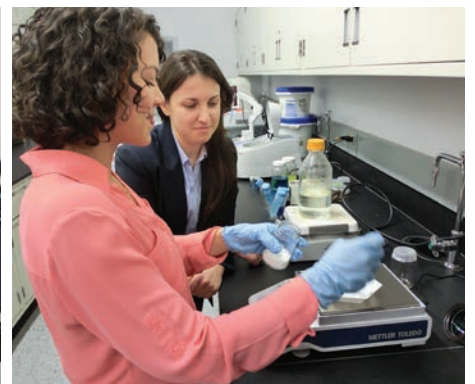
"If it's a matter that life is tight because of other necessary expenses – you're budgeting not with money, but with time," she said. "You're looking at expenses not just as dollars, but as time, as energy, as what is nurturing. ... You can spend a lot of money on entertainment and still not feel fulfilled." **RHL**

planningWise Wealth, part of Coburn & Meredith, Inc., is at 1 Old Mill Lane in Simsbury. Visit www.planningwisewealth.com or call 860-784-2605 for more information. FDW Advisory Group is located at 29 South Main St., Suite 210 in West Hartford. For more information, call 860-920-5040 or visit fdwgroup.website.raymondjames.com.

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Tax return fraud is increasing

How to prevent it and what to do if it happens to you

by Nancy Thompson
Editor

Last year, the state of Connecticut stopped about \$38 million in fraudulent tax returns, about double the amount from the year before. In 2012, the amount was about \$7 million.

To say it's become an epidemic is an understatement.

"It's a constant, constant battle," said Kevin Sullivan, commissioner of the state's Department of Revenue Services. "There are more breaches and more energetic thieves, but we're working harder and smarter."

Fraudulent tax returns have become a big issue for states and for the federal government, and all are taking precautions to prevent them.

"We're doing a number of things," Sullivan said, adding that the department cannot reveal all of its new measures.

"We have three layers of screening on all returns. We use comparison data, and this year, employers' W-2 forms will come in January instead of March so we'll have that information. We have definitely and deliberately slowed down, and first-time filers will not have the option of direct deposit. Where we see issues we want to buy time."

He said taxpayers filing state

returns electronically can use the taxpayer service center's online site, which is highly secure and available at no charge, and urged people hiring a tax accountant to be sure the person is reputable.

"The Better Business Bureau is a good source, and seniors and people on limited incomes can have their returns done at their senior center or through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service," Sullivan said.

Taxpayers can do their part to help, too. Filing early is an effective way to deter thieves.

"The sooner you file, the less likely it is that some crook will file before you do," Sullivan said.

Bruce Filingeri, a certified public accountant and tax partner at Sheptoff, Reuber and Company, P.C. in Glastonbury, offers clients several tips to minimize the chance of becoming the victim of identity theft and the possibility of having their tax return filed fraudulently.

He tells clients not to carry their Social Security card or any other document with a Social Security number on it; not to give a business their Social Security number unless

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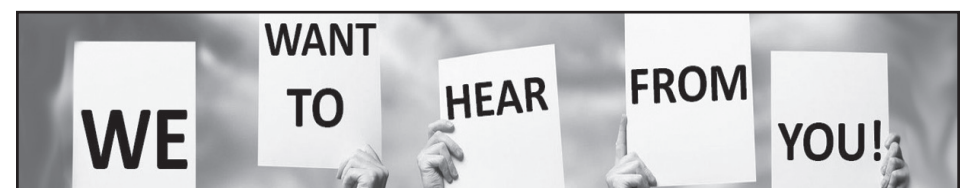
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required; protect financial information; check their credit report every 12 months; keep personal information in your home secure; and to protect personal computers by using firewalls and anti-spam/virus software, updating security patches and changing passwords for Internet accounts.

Matt Hill, a certified public accountant and tax expert with an office in Wethersfield, offered several tips for decreasing the likelihood of a fraudulent tax return and advice to anyone who learns their taxes have been filed fraudulently.

"In order to minimize the likelihood of someone filing your taxes before you, don't give out your Social Security number or birthdate or prepare your taxes utilizing an unsecure network," he said. "You would be surprised how many individuals file their taxes at Starbucks or Burger King."

When taxpayers file early, it provides a two-week window for the

government to deposit a refund into a fraudster's account. If it does happen, he offers this suggestion: "If you discover your taxes have been filed fraudulently, even though you may face a long wait time on the phone, contact the tax authorities immediately. Doing so may save you significant time waiting for the IRS or state to sort through the fraud and allow you to properly file your returns."

It's also important not to reply to phone calls or emails from people claiming to be with the state or federal tax agencies.

"We and the IRS contact taxpayers only by letter, not phone calls or emails," said Sullivan, who himself was targeted in a scam phone call last year by someone claiming to be from the "Internal Revenue Services."

An unwelcome surprise

Many taxpayers have no idea that someone else has stolen their information and filed their tax return until they get a letter from the IRS.

"Dear Taxpayer," it reads. "Someone may have attempted to impersonate you by using your name and Social Security number ..."

The letter goes on to explain that the IRS has removed the incorrect return and corrected the bad information and will flag the account for extra scrutiny in the future.

This year, the IRS is also assigning personal identification numbers to taxpayers whose accounts have been hacked, which should help prevent a recurrence, but millions of others are still at risk.

Some blame the recent spike in the number of fraudulent returns on data breaches involving Anthem, JP Morgan Chase debit cards and identity theft rings in Florida and elsewhere, but thieves have many ways to get personal information.

The IRS, the states and the tax industry are working together on several new initiatives to thwart them, including new password standards for tax software and increased efforts

to share information about identity theft schemes, and efforts to increase awareness among taxpayers.

A recent bulletin issued by the IRS lists several steps, including more than 20 pieces of shared data to help the software industry and the IRS stop fraudulent returns, information about the length of time it took to create an electronic return, new password standards to access tax software along with a new timed lockout feature and limited unsuccessful login attempts, and the addition of three security questions. More information on the new steps are detailed online at irs.gov/Individuals/Taxes-Security-Together and IRS publication 4524.

Sullivan has this advice for anyone who believes their tax return was filed fraudulently despite the new safeguards: "Call the IRS or the DRS immediately or go to either agency immediately online," he said, adding that taxpayers who may have a problem will hear about it by mail. **RHL**

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Holy Week Schedule

Holy Thursday, March 24 ~ 7:00 P.M.

Mass of the Lord's Supper

Good Friday, March 25 ~ 3:00 P.M.

Celebration of the Lord's Passion



Holy Saturday, March 26 ~ 8:00 P.M.

Easter Vigil

Easter Sunday, March 27

Masses at 7:30, 9:30 and 11:30 A.M.

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HOLY WEEK LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

CONFESSIONS

Monday, 6:00-7:00pm

PALM SUNDAY MASSES

Saturday, March 19th 4:00pm (*Vigil Mass*)

Sunday, March 20th 7:30am,
9:30am (*Solemn Blessing*), and 11:30am

HOLY THURSDAY, March 24

No Morning Mass

Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7:00pm

Visit to the Repository (*Parish Center*)
until 10:15pm

Night Prayer at 10:15pm

GOOD FRIDAY, March 25

Morning Prayer, 8:00am

Solemn Good Friday Liturgy, 3:00pm

Way of the Cross, 7:00pm

HOLY SATURDAY, March 26

Blessing of Easter Food, 12 noon

Solemn Easter Vigil, 8:00pm

EASTER SUNDAY MASSES

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March 20 – 10:00 a.m. Palm Sunday Worship in the Sanctuary

March 24 – 7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service in the Sanctuary

March 26 – 3:00 p.m. Holy Saturday Family Activities & Worship

March 27 – Sunrise Easter Service at Rose Hill Cemetery

Breakfast to follow at the church in Chapin Hall

10:00 a.m. Easter Service in the Sanctuary

For our complete Lent schedule, visit rhccucc.org/lent

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Lenten Calendar

Palm Sunday

March 20th

Procession of Palms 10:00 am

Maundy Thursday

March 24th

Service at 7:30 pm

Good Friday

March 25th

Family Worship 2:00 pm

Evening Worship 7:30 pm

Easter Sunday

March 27th

Sunrise Service 6:30 am

at Indian Hill Country Club

Worship in the Sanctuary

9 am and 11 am

Written history

Woman self-publishes a book chronicling her family's past

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

When Dorothy Holleran began writing down stories that her husband's family told in the 1950s, she never dreamed that more than 60 years later, those tales would blossom into something more.

"Sometimes things get started and you don't realize you're starting a whole project," she said, sitting in an armchair in her Fern Street home. "It started out with just stories that I'd write down."

Now in her 90s, the longtime resident recalls sitting with her late husband's family and hearing them talk about the generations that came before them. She was handed a notepad and began jotting down the details and keeping them for her own collection.

Hearing all of this piqued her curiosity and she began probing for more information.

"We started asking more questions like, 'was Grandpa 2 years old or 4 years old when he came from Ireland?'" she recalled.

As the years went on, she moved from simply writing down stories as she heard them to researching the past, dating back as far as 1881.

"I started with my husband's family, the Holleran family, then I worked on my family, the Mulligan family," she said.

"She began tracking all of that stuff back," her son Jack Holleran said. "This was all before the Internet, so it was hard information to find."

The challenge did not deter Dorothy, who continued researching her family after she and her husband, John, retired and began spending winters in Florida.

"We had a wonderful organization in the library in Vero Beach. It was a wonderful experience," she said. "They had a whole department in that library set up for this kind of research."

As the years went on, her commitment to researching her family even took her to Salt Lake City, where she was able to find information on her parents' generation.

"People died so young back



Long-time Rocky Hill resident Dorothy Holleran's home is filled with photos of her family throughout the years, including one of her mother-in-law from 1910. Now, much of her family's stories are recorded in the book she recently self-published.

Photos by Allie Rivera

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With the editing help of her son, Jack Holleran, Dorothy Holleran spent the greater part of a year working to assemble stories about her family that she has been writing since the 1950s.

LIVING *Your Best* LIFE

then. We didn't have the medicines and everything that we do now," she said. "If a man lived to be 60, that was a normal age."

The ancestors she found on both the Holleran side and the Mulligan side came to the United States from Ireland, most in the middle to late 1800s.

"My grandmother came

childhood growing up in New Haven and then my father's childhood in Ohio."

By recalling her own past, she became fascinated to find how different the world has become.

"My husband grew up without electricity," she said. "This is marvelous, what has happened from those early days to now."

include the experiences of both her husband and her brother during World War II. John travelled aboard the Queen Mary with the first troops to head overseas for New Guinea.

"They spent 40 days on that ship," she said. "They never thought they'd get home. They thought they were forgotten."

"When they see what their grandparents and great-grandparents went through, I want them to understand."

—Dorothy Holleran

over from Ireland before the Civil War because of the hunger," she said.

After learning as much as she could about the generation before her, Dorothy decided to keep researching and writing down stories from her family.

"The first thing she wrote about was her parents, my grandparents," Jack said. "Then she wrote about her

Dorothy's stories also tell about her move with her husband to Rocky Hill, where she still lives in the home they built. While the house is the same, the neighborhood is drastically different.

"Before this, it was a potato farm," she recalled with a laugh. "You could say that I'm the grandmother of all these trees here."

She took special care to

"It was very scary. You'd go months without hearing from them," she added.

Dorothy also wrote about her brother, Bill, who served at both the D-Day invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge.

"That ruined him," she said softly. "What saved him was the friendship he had with my husband."

After all of the stories she

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Pam P., family member



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had written over the years, she and her son came up with an idea.

"We got to this point about a year or so ago where I said, 'We should put these all together as a book,'" Jack said. "They had all been printed up in three-ring binders before that."

With him serving as her editor, Dorothy spent the last year working to organize her stories and gather more information to complete her history of her family and self-publish it as a book.

"It was quite a project," she said.

Now both a grandmother and great-grandmother, she is glad to be able to pass along the stories of her family to younger generations.

"I think it will be important for the great-grandchildren to know and I'm hoping that they'll understand their obligation to the family," she said. "When they see what their grandparents and great-grandparents went through, I want them to understand."

So far, the young people in her family are enjoying the history. Dorothy and Jack had roughly a dozen copies of the book, which reached 300 pages, printed to give to the family.

"We have a little great-grandson who is 12 years old and every night he takes his Grandpa's stories to bed with him," Dorothy said.

Along with the anecdotal and researched stories, she also included information about family lineage and a record of past family reunions.

"Everybody I know that sees it says the same thing – 'I wish we had had this,'" Jack said.

With the book printed and distributed to family, Dorothy is glad to be able to share a positive history with those she loves.

"I try in the stories to tell the good parts. I've seen so much sorrow in this world and I don't want to be a part of it," she said before pausing to smile. "I guess I'm kind of a Pollyanna." **RHL**



Photos by Allie Rivera

Hanging in her Fern Street home are numerous photographs and mementos from Dorothy Holleran's life, including this framed piece with a photo and war medals from her late husband, John.



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From the mayor's desk

by Mayor Claudia Baio

This is the first of a planned series of columns to provide an additional community communication forum. Thank you to Rocky Hill LIFE for providing this opportunity.

Thank you also to the Rocky Hill voters for placing your confidence in me and the rest of the Town Council and Board of Education members. It is my honor to serve as your mayor.

If there is an issue or content that you would like to see addressed in this column, please contact me with your input. We will be including interesting updates from our town staff as well. So here we go with our inaugural column.

Our Rocky Hill community was busy over the holidays, with many community events. It was nice to see so many people come out for our annual tree lighting with our most special guest, Santa Claus.

We held our first Coffee with the Mayor event Dec. 18 at Bob's Coffee Shop. In addition to providing an opportunity to get to know each other and for casual conversation, questions and answers and a sharing of ideas, we also supported a good cause.

What a great turnout we had. It was a great opportunity to get to talk to each other, address questions, share ideas and get to know each other better. One additional benefit,



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which I had not contemplated but was so pleased to see, was that neighbors who had not previously known each other got to interact. It was a great opportunity for conversation.

Those who attended brought nonperishable food donations to support our Rocky Hill Food Pantry, including Wethersfield Mayor Paul Montinieri, who made a guest appearance. Thank you to those who attended for making our first event a success and to the owners and staff of Bob's for their hospitality and service.

By the time of the publication of this column, we will have held our second, this one at Town Line Diner. We will be scheduling these events quarterly and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

I have also been busy attending various meetings with residents, local municipal and state political leaders, often with Deputy Mayor Joseph Kochanek, and some with my fellow council members.

Just before the Christmas holiday, I attended a meeting of

mayors from the 1st Congressional District hosted by U.S. Rep. John Larson. It was great to gather to share and collaborate with fellow municipal leaders, including our neighboring mayors from Wethersfield, Newington, Glastonbury and Hartford.

I am excited to report that we

leadership and our senior services staff along with state Rep. Tony Guerrero, state Sen. Paul Doyle and Councilman John Emmanuel, chairman of the Senior Liaison Subcommittee, town staff and our town manager.

In February, I, along with Deputy Mayor Kochanek and

a gas infusion plant at the phase 2 of the industrial park to proceed by allowing an amendment to a town ordinance that would have permitted the applicant to proceed to the planning and zoning and inland wetlands commissions for purposes of seeking to obtain the various approvals necessary to move forward with their projects.

The Town Council voted unanimously to reject the proposal. We put a lot of consideration into the decision and did our due diligence before voting. In weighing the pros and cons, the cons outweighed the pros.

I voted based upon all the factors presented for what I believe to be in the best interest of the town and its residents. I am pleased to see that at the end of the day all counselors came around to voting unanimously on this issue.

As promised, I am holding regular office hours. They will be Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Anyone wishing to schedule an appointment can send me an email or call 860-258-2740. **RHL**

"I voted based upon all the factors presented for what I believe to be in the best interest of the town and its residents."

—Claudia Baio

discussed renewing our collaborative of local mayors and anticipate moving forward with that.

Right after the new year, we were excited to host U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, who visited Rocky Hill to explore opportunities for potential sources for federal funding for our town.

We had a very productive meeting with our fire department

Councilor O'Sullivan, had the pleasure of joining Gov. Dannel Malloy and Catherine Smith, economic development and community development commissioner, who toured one of our local businesses, PDQ Inc.

As many of you may be aware, at the January Town Council meeting, we voted on a difficult matter of whether to allow the application for

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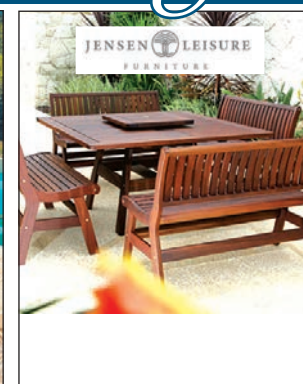
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Still Hill Brewery serves up locally brewed craft beer

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Photos by Mark Jahne



Guests crowd the bar during the Jan. 4 grand opening of Still Hill Brewery. Below: Four beers were on tap on opening day.

The newest brewery in the state is located in an industrial park space with a loading dock. But when one walks in the door, it transforms into a cozy tap room with the feel of an old New England barn.

Still Hill Brewery opened for business Jan. 4. It is the combined effort of 18 investors led by President Scott Barbanel and his wife, Susan, of Glastonbury. They are the president and marketing manager, respectively.

Scott is the owner and largest shareholder. Right now he has no paid staff; the other shareholders are helping with the brewing and staffing the tap room.

Mayor Claudia Baio, state legislators, town officials and the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce all turned out for the occasion, as well as a large number of guests. Many of them bellied up to the bar for a first taste of Still Hill's product.

The brew house is located at 1275 Cromwell Ave. in the

Shunpike Business Center, close to the Cromwell town line. It can be found at the back of building C. The tap room and brewery cover a combined 4,200 square feet.

The Barbanels plan to have three beers always on tap: Still Hill IPA (India pale ale), Still Hill APA (American pale ale) and Red Storm Ryesing amber ale. Also being served was Sluggo Buggy stout.

The other offerings will change with the seasons and with Scott's desire to experiment with new flavors. Artist Tao LaBossiere created the two-walled mural that gives the tap room its barn-like atmosphere.

"We took possession of the space in March 2015. It's been a long process. We started the business plan in 2013," Scott said.

He grew up in Swampscott, Mass., before moving to Connecticut. Susan grew up in Glastonbury.

"We moved down to be closer to her mom," Scott said.

Both bring business expertise to this new undertaking. He is the



controller of Genevieve Swiss Industries in Westfield, Mass., and she is group sales manager for Travel Insured International.

"I was not a beer drinker," Scott said.

At least, not until his brother in law got him interested in the beverage. Later on, he visited what he called a brew on the premises place.

"About the time I got out of college, Sam [Adams] came out," he added. "I got bitten by the bug hard."

He called Jim Koch of Sam

Adams the East Coast godfather of craft beer. Scott loves to cook and develop recipes for new flavors of beer.

"I'm a numbers guy, so I've always been into the science. Brewing has a lot of science behind it," he said.

While people can go to Still Hill to sample the beer, it is neither a restaurant nor a bar. There is no kitchen, so food is not served. The bar only has Still Hill beer, no other alcoholic beverages.

"We are not a brew pub, we are a tap room. We are not a bar. We're

"It's an exciting time to be part of the craft beer industry in Connecticut."

—Scott Barbanel

about the beer," he said.

"It's a place where I can preach about drinking locally and support the Connecticut brewers. Our primary business is a package brewery."

He does plan to have food trucks come by so that hungry guests can find something to nibble on if they wish. His license also allows him to sell pre-packaged food.

There is room to seat around 80 people at the bar and nearby tables as well as counter space along one wall.

"This is a tried-and-true business model. The toughest part of a start-up brewery is getting people familiar with your beer," Scott said.

"It's been a lot of work to get here. It's an exciting time to be part of the craft beer industry in Connecticut."

Craft brewing is among the state's fastest-growing industries, he said. There were only six such breweries just a few years ago and his makes 33. He expected two more to open by the time this issue of Rocky Hill LIFE went to press.

Scott said beer is more difficult to make than wine, adding that American craft brews are now more highly regarded than in the past. But that didn't dissuade him from following his dream. He uses only high-quality ingredients.

"Some of my malts come from overseas ... most of my hops come from the West Coast," he said.

He's running three fermenters to start. Still Hill Brewery will host

a Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce networking event in March.

Susan is delighted with how the space turned out. She noted that all of the wood in the tap room was reclaimed from one scrap heap or another.

"It looks amazing. It all came together," she said. "I've been supporting him as he honed his craft."

The couple has two children.

She used her marketing skills to

create a social media campaign and Still Hill already has more than 1,000 likes on Facebook.

"People have been so supportive," she said.

Pints in the tap room sell for \$5 or one can buy a sample tasting, or flight, of all four beers currently being served for \$6. Growler jugs are available for take home in 32-ounce and 64-ounce sizes. These are priced at \$6 and \$10, respectively. **RHL**

Tap room hours are 4-8 p.m. Friday and noon to 6 p.m. Saturday. To learn more call 860-436-6368 or visit stillhillbrewery.com.



Photos by Mark Jahne



Top: These shiny new boilers are part of the brewing process.

Middle: Scott Barbanel is the president and brewer. He is delighted with the early reviews of his various beers.



Right: These fermenters are where the ingredients come together to create a tasty brew.

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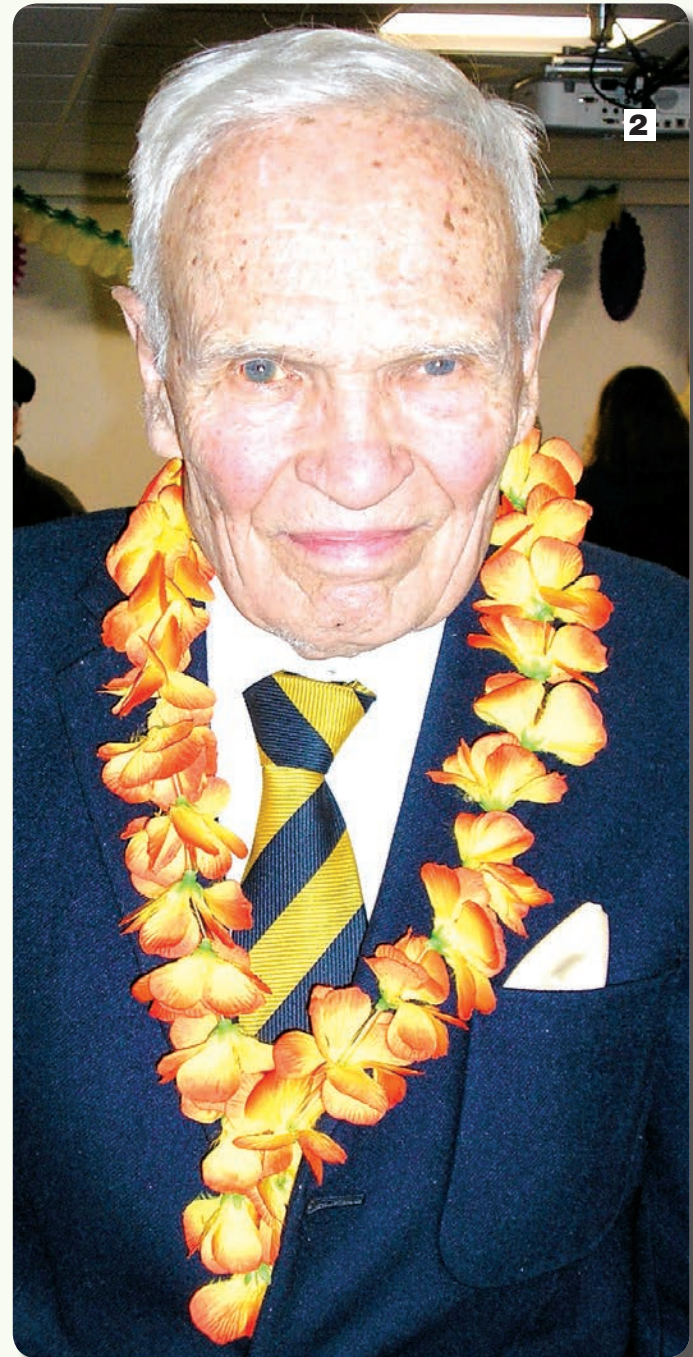
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Slice of LIFE

photos by Mark Jahne



Off to Hawaii

The Cora J. Belden Library offered a program on Hawaiian Hula to bring warm thoughts to town on a cold winter's eve. The presenter was Pumehana Cartagena of Hartford, who dances with the Kahana Hula group. **1.** Heather Taylor, Alexander Taylor and Wiroslaw Snihurowych answered the call when Cartagena invited people to dance alongside her. **2.** Wiroslaw Snihurowych brought his own flowered lei. The retired lieutenant colonel spent time in Hawaii during his service in the U.S. Army. **3.** Members of the crowd practice a hula set to the song "One Paddle." **4.** Those seated toward the front of the room imitate Cartagena's hand movements. The program drew a full house to the library's Stepney Room. **5.** Everyone on their feet, it's audience participation time. **6.** Pumehana Cartagena demonstrates an ancient form of hula. It was traditionally only danced by men. The hula is not just a dance. Its movements are designed to tell the story of the Hawaiian people. **7.** The colorfully dressed Cartagena leads a room full of new hula dancers through their paces.



News roundup

Harlem Superstars coming to town

The Rocky Hill Education Foundation is sponsoring a basketball game at 7 p.m. March 5 at Rocky Hill High School to raise funds for the foundation. It pits the Harlem Superstars against the Rocky Hill Dream Team, comprised of local teachers and administrators.

The goal of the Harlem squad is to bring quality enrichment opportunities to students. Superintendent of Schools Mark Zito will serve as the official timekeeper.

Tickets are \$10 in advance payable to the Rocky Hill Education Foundation or \$12 at the door. RHHS students will only be charged \$10 at the door with a valid student ID. Tickets may be purchased at Bob's Coffee House or by emailing Leona at adamczyk-kids@cox.net.

The foundation is raising money to support One Book, One Community, an event that promotes reading and unites Stevens and West Hill schools. For the past two years, students in grades K-5 have come together to read a common text.

Support Dennis Clair

A fundraiser to aid Rocky Hill resident Dennis Clair, who is fighting a battle against liver cancer, is scheduled from 1-5 p.m. April 24 at Chicago Sam's, 51 Shunpike Road, Cromwell. The suggested donation is \$50, but any size donation will be accepted at the door.

This event is all about friends gathering for an afternoon of camaraderie and encouragement. Participants will enjoy a buffet meal and cash bar.

Checks should be made payable to Brendan Lynch for Dennis Clair. Those unable to attend can send a donation to: Dennis Clair Fundraiser, c/o Brendan Lynch, 68 Stillman Walk, Wethersfield, CT 06109. Call 860-690-3444 for additional details.

New bench arrives

The Stepney Seniors purchased a new outdoor bench for use outside the Rocky Hill Community Center. Mayor Claudia Baio cut the ribbon Feb. 18 at a brief ceremony to officially dedicate the bench, which will provide a place where senior citizens and others can sit while enjoying some fresh air or awaiting a ride.

Dental clinic for seniors

In partnership with the North Central Agency on Aging and the Lodge at Cold Spring, the Central Connecticut Health District is providing free dental cleanings to residents who are 60 and older. The clinics are scheduled for 8:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. March 9-10 at the Lodge at Cold Spring, 50 Cold Spring Road.

While the service is free, donations will be accepted. There is a limit of five patients per day. Reserve a spot by calling Lori DiPietro at 860-721-2824. **RHL**



Harlem Superstars



Rocky Hill Community Center

Photo by Mark Jahne

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		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



1 Career Coaching, 10 a.m. to noon, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

1 Knitting Group, 11 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 8, 15, 22 and 29

1 Getting Started with Windows 10, 2 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24 and 29

1 Creative Writing, 4:15 p.m., for grades 3-5, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

1 CT Hearing Voices Network support group, 7 p.m., Rocky Hill Congregational Church, 805-817 Old Main St., second floor classroom, 203-391-4968, also March 8, 15, 22 and 29

2 Playgroup Plus, 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

2 Minecraft Club, 5:30 p.m., for grades 6-12, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

2 Mystery Book Discussion, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 9, 16, 23 and 30

2 Volunteens Information Session, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

3 La Leche League, 10 a.m. to noon, 23 Textbook Ave., 860-529-2307 or mgubala@sbcglobal.net

3 ESL Classes, 10:30 a.m.,

registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 10, 17, 24 and 31

3 Family Make It, Take It, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 10, 17, 24 and 31

4 Art Start, 10:30 a.m., for ages 2 and older, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

4 Mini Machines, 4 p.m., for grades 3-5, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 18

5 Harlem Superstars vs. Rocky Hill Dream Team, 7 p.m., Rocky Hill High School

7 AARP Tax Help, 10:15 a.m., appointment required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 14, 21 and 28

7 SCORE Business Counseling, 12:30-4:30 p.m., appointment required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

7 Computer Basics, 2 and 7 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

7 Computer Explorers, 4:15 p.m., for grades K-2, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

8 Minecraft Club, 4 p.m., for grades 3-5, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

9 Free Dental Cleaning Clinic, 8:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., for ages 60 and older, The Lodge at Cold Spring,

50 Cold Spring Road, 860-721-2824, also March 10

9 Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group, 6 p.m., The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., 860-563-5588 or ehall@benchmarkquality.com

9 Teen Tech Week: Stop Motion Video, 6:30 p.m., for grades 6-12, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

9 Friends of the Library, 7 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

10 Youth Art Month Reception, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 10

11 Family Dance Party, 10:30 a.m., all ages with an adult, registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

12 Young Crafters Connection, 10 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

12 Magnificent Multiples, 10:15 a.m., for families with multiple children of all ages, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

12 Book Wars, 2 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

14 Introduction to Social Media, 2 and 7 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

16 Cocoa & Crafts, 6 p.m., for grades 3-5, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

18 LEGO Free Play, 10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

18 Author Talk with Ann Nyberg, 10:30 a.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

19 Rainbow Magic Book Club, 2 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

21 Excel for Beginners, 2 and 7 p.m., call to register, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

28 Keep Your Computer Secure, 2 and 7 p.m., call to register, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

29 Read with Toby the Certified Therapy Dog, 4 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

29 Celebrating 300 Years of Women in Connecticut, 6:30 p.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7621 or rockyhilllibrary.info

30 Graphic Novel Book Club, 6 p.m., for grades 3-5, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

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Elks National Foundation National Hoop Shoot Competition



People notes

Rocky Hill High School senior **Patrick Sullivan** signed his NCAA national letter of intent to play lacrosse at Sacred Heart University.

Peggy Minga (girls 12-13) finished second and **Norah Saluja** (girls 10-11) finished first in the Elks National Foundation National Hoop Shoot competition. Norah is moving on to the New England Regional Championships in Portland, Maine. Both girls are Griswold Middle School students.

Babitha Adapa, Crystal Flores, Ryan Holden and Darci Abate were named to the president's list at Goodwin College.

Elizabeth Cicia, Megan Husson, Mallory Smith and Christina Cox were named to the dean's list at Goodwin College.

Jennifer Shook, Andrew Watson, Jacob Tvaronaitis and

Mark Sheehan were named AP Scholars at Kingswood Oxford School.

Jeremy Prema, Saranya Tadikonda, Andi Duro, Neil Patel, Tej Patel and Brooke Dunnery earned high honors for the first marking period at the University High School of Science and Engineering. **Aakash Balaji, Nasin Hasan, Dominick Hollister, Clinton Palmeri, Amaan Moledina, Munmun Hasan and Brianna Hollister** earned honors.

Rocky Hill residents **Addison Pancoast**, 6, as Fruit Child/ Ignorance and **Ethan Pancoast**, 10, as School Boy, appeared in the Hartford Stage Production of "A Christmas Carol."

Anthony Gallo was one of 49 fall student-athletes to be honored by the New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference for their work inside the classroom. He is enrolled

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at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. **Matt Safalow** and **Robert Downes** participate on Kingswood Oxford School's Upper School Mock Trial team.

Ellen Dalo was among the 85 students inducted into the Aquinas Chapter of the National Honor Society at Northwest Catholic High School.

Annamma Chaluparambil, Ellen Dalo, Olivia Emmanuel, Emily Grandell, Megan Grandell, Lauren Italia, Alexander Janusko, Alexander Kamansky, Nicholas Kamansky, Abby Oostendorp, Adam Sorrentino and **Kathleen Yorio** earned first honors for the first quarter at Northwest Catholic High School. **Nicholas Alzugaray** and **Erika Peterson** earned second honors.

Leander Wang Vergara was named to the dean's list at Choate Rosemary Hall.

Lynn Aureli was named to the dean's list at Quinnipiac University.

Megan Ruonavaara was named to the dean's list at Stonehill College.

Rachel Haze was named to the dean's list at the University of Connecticut.

Kelly Clancy was inducted into the Western New England University Maureen Keizer chapter of the National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH).

Thomas Kelly was named to the dean's list at Keene State College.

Christopher Castanho was named to the dean's list at Shenandoah University.

Kelly Clancy, Isabella Garzone and **Nicholas Herrmann** were named to the president's list at Western New England University.

Brittany Cardillo, Antonio Carlone, Dominique D'Costa, Kara Dotolo, Leah Magnoli and **Kelsey Palazzo** and were named to the dean's list at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Taia Lionetti was named to the dean's list at Springfield College.

Madison Bradley, Kellyanne Cahill, Eugenia Cho, Jessica Grodovich, Martha Johnson, Lan Lou, Laura Outeiro and **Madison Swilling** earned high honors at Mercy High School. **Julia Bouchard, Brooklyn Bradley, Margaret Goulette, Alina Hafeez, Junkai "Apple" Hu,**

Morgan Parrotta, Alyssa Scandura, Julia Wenceslao and **Shenyang "Samantha" Zhang** earned first honors.

Brianna Calderon earned high honors on the dean's list at the University of New Hampshire.

Clinton Palmeri, Jeremy Prema, Saranya Tadikonda, Andi Duro, Neil Patel, Tej Patel and **Brooke Dunnery** earned high honors at the University High School of Science and Engineering. **Aakash Balaji, Dominick Hollister, Brianna Hollister** and **Anxhela Mete** earned honors.

Mary Harrison, Alden Hellmuth, Thomas Koyles, Kristen Lauria, Ariana Marshall, Geetanjalie Neemcharan, Ankita Patel, Taylor Rocco, Rachel Sekorski and **Johannah Veinot** were named to the dean's list at the University of Hartford.

Evan Menze and **Emily Rose Siegel** were named to the dean's list at the University of Rhode Island.

Brian Kennedy received an award from the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence in his role as a senior assistant state's attorney. He was recognized as one of "The First 100 Plus" men and women in the state demonstrating commitment to improving the lives of domestic violence victims in a professional role.

Dale Reese was named to the dean's list at Grove City College.

Shane Steinman was named to the dean's list at Marist College.

Jennifer Faenza and **Mallory Monaco** were named to the dean's list at Assumption College.

Erika Vuernick was named to the dean's list at Western New England University.

Kelsey Brennan was inducted into Lambda Pi Eta, the communication honor society, at Keene State College.

Gianpaolo Colasacco was inducted into Triota Gamma Kappa, the women's and gender studies honor society, at Keene State College.

Sree Lakshmi Manohara Rao Kadiyala earned a degree from the University of Memphis.

Jacquelin Saucier was named to the dean's list at the College of St. Rose.

Kyle Wolf was named to the dean's list at Sacred Heart University. **RHL**

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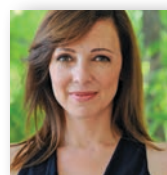
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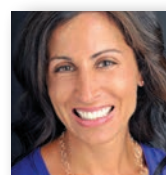
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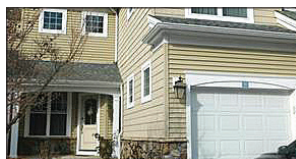
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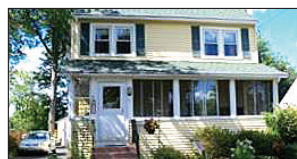
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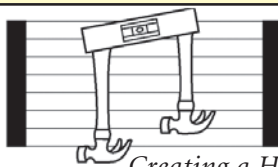
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Editorial

So where do we cut?

It's budget season for both local and state government and, as always, taxes are at the forefront of most people's minds. They almost always seem to go up, don't they? The only question is how much.

That is partly due to the fact that government, just like homeowners and businesses, faces the same annual increase in costs for water, electricity, natural gas, oil, telecommunications, motor vehicles, various forms of insurance and countless other things.

One of the few commodities that has dramatically decreased in cost over the past year is gasoline. But how long will that last?

We clamor for our elected officials to keep taxes under control. Sometimes that works, at least at the municipal level. But so many costs are fixed in terms of labor agreements, employee benefits and such that the focus switches to the rest.

At the state level, we have seen decades of increased spending as government continues to grow. It's easy to spend other people's money and a series of governors and legislatures have done just that for decades.

The challenge is that there are only so many new sources of revenue to tap and the last



thing most people want is an expansion of the products and services that become subject to taxation. That leaves no option but cutting the budget.

On paper, this sounds simple. Surely we can trim a little here and lop off a little there. That should help, right?

It does, but nipping and tucking will not make a significant dent in the tax burden, either locally or at the state level. One needs big cuts to achieve big savings.

So where do we cut? Which programs and services need to be reduced in size or scope to less than desired levels in the name of budget reform?

Do we reduce local or state spending for education? If so, are we willing to accept less-accomplished children as a result?

Do we cut Medicaid or other programs that primarily serve senior citizens? If so, where do they turn for help? Social services at all levels are already strapped for staff and cash.

Do we reduce the number of police on the streets or troopers on the highways? Do we reduce the number of snow plows? Do we slash programs that help the poor, the developmentally disabled, the long-term unemployed?

There are no easy answers, but the people we voted into office we tasked with the duty of making these hard decisions. We need to hold their feet to the fire while at the same time understanding that this is a daunting task. **RHL**

Letter

Story hit the mark

To the Editor:

Your February article on seeking manufacturing in Rocky Hill was right on the money. We need more manufacturing in Rocky Hill.

Manufacturing is cleaner than it used to be. Berlin did a beautiful job with TOMZ

Corporation, ASSAY ABLOY and Precision Punch. Middletown's industrial is beautiful, too, they did a fine job and you wouldn't realize it is manufacturing.

It can be done. Office jobs are nice, but in Rocky Hill,

there have been businesses that move in and out of the office parks. The taxes need to be fair for businesses, also, not too low and not too high.

Unfortunately, there is an attitude of not in my back yard.
—William Marquardt

rocky hill LIFE

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



Spring Forward

After hitting rock bottom day-light-wise back on the Winter Solstice in December, we've been steadily gaining daylight (recently 2-3 min/day). We'll continue to do so as we head toward the summer solstice (June 20th). And this month, two important things

happen pertaining to the sun:

(1) On Sunday, the 13th, Daylight Saving Time (DST) kicks off – officially at 2 a.m. This is when we set our clocks ahead one hour, to reallocate time from the morning to the afternoon. It's easiest to turn clocks ahead an hour before going to sleep Saturday; then on Sunday, the sun rises at 7:05 a.m. and sets at

6:56 p.m. It's also a good time to put fresh batteries in the smoke detectors!

(2) One week later, on the 20th, is the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere – the official beginning of spring (at 12:30 a.m.). The term "equinox" is Latin, referring to the days of the year when there is equal day and equal night – when the Earth's

axis is not tilting in either direction toward or away from the sun (also occurring in September with the transition from summer to autumn). However, the exact timing is more of an approximate - on the 20th we will actually have 12 hours and 10 minutes of possible daylight (sunrise 6:53 a.m., sunset 7:04 p.m.). **RHL**



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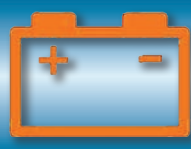
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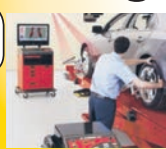
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